Visitors Only? New Orleans' Tourism Industry and the Construction of Space in the City

Honors Research Thesis

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by

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Author: "How does your office try to deal with the negative effects of tourism in New Orleans?"

Scott Hutcheson, the Cultural Economy Liaison to the Mayor: "I don't see any. What would someone say [about tourism] that would be negative?"

Introduction

This paper addresses a major focus of urban studies: the politics of local economic development in the US city. It does so through a case study of New Orleans and its tourism industry. Specifically, I will examine development based on tourism by analyzing it within the context of the politics of local economic development. Efforts towards local economic development typically take place through a local growth coalition. These coalitions will most often focus on creating ideal conditions for investment within their city. If they are successful, companies will invest in the city, increasing demand for land and other amenities. In short, local growth coalitions exist to promote demand typically for land and various services, particularly retail and utilities, in their city. Competitive cities will be those with amenities that are attractive to companies: low taxes, strong city services, etc. A location that attempts to be appealing to tourists is different.[1]

Successful promotion of an economy based on tourism is not solely about attracting demand for common services like land, gas and electricity. Instead, it is important that a specific product be maintained: an ideal tourist experience. Cities that specialize in tourism compete to offer a short-term experience to visitors—in other words, a vacation. Thus, tourist economies must focus on supply instead of demand. Tourism-based or not, growth politics is influenced by class, with definite winners and losers. Costs must be incurred, but a growth coalition will attempt to have

[1] For the purposes of this paper, the tourism industry will be defined as hospitality industries (hotels, restaurants, and cultural attractions) as well as the city agencies that promote and sometimes fund them.

someone else bear them. In the case of tourism, this cost-transferring takes place through controlling wages for workers in the industry.

For growth based on tourism to be successful, it is also extremely important that a specific product be maintained. Coalitions form within the city to maintain the experience that is marketed to customers. In contrast to other tourist towns like Las Vegas or Atlantic City, New Orleans markets itself primarily as an "authentic" place. Its specific product is an opportunity to partake in a unique cultural milieu that will allow a visitor to relax in a place that embodies a very particular history. This heritage is not a natural occurrence. Instead, it comprises a set of cultural practices that were created by (or through the exploitation of) marginalized groups. Practices like jazz, for instance, have their roots in slavery and codified discrimination. The tradition of luxurious living, another aspect of the New Orleans heritage and one promoted through city nicknames like "The Big Easy," also takes its roots from the history of slavery and exploited African American labor.

This creates a dilemma for those who sell these cultural products to visitors. It is not a history that people want to dwell on. The fact that the creators of this heritage were black is also problematic in a national culture deeply scarred by racial divisions. Culture practices must therefore both be removed from their (uncompensated) creators and divorced from their fraught pasts in order to be sold to tourists. In the case of traditionally African American cultural practices, this has led to a situation in which cultural creators are further marginalized, ignored despite the essential role that their "products" play in the maintenance of the "New Orleans Experience." Despite the fact that the African Americans make up 59% of the city's population

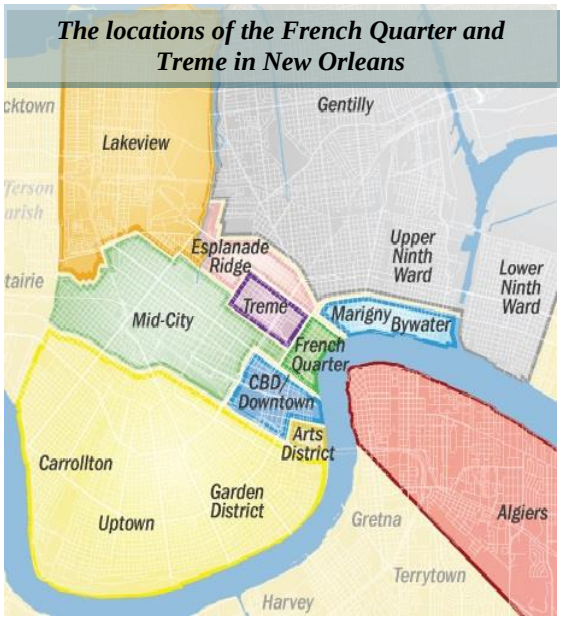
(down from 67% before Hurricane Katrina), they are disproportionately the "losers" in the tourism-based economy (GNODC 2013). This leads to distinct social tensions surrounding tourism that must be managed by the industry.

Despite these issues, the tourism industry remains a powerful presence within the New Orleans economy and is fully supported by the city government. The hospitality and leisure sector[2] accounts for forty four percent of jobs in the city (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), and contributes $200-225 million dollars in tax revenues every year to Orleans Parish (New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2013a). Despite the differences between tourism-based economies and economies based on other industries, the fact of politics of local economic development in cities, as in the growth coalitions discussed elsewhere (Cox and Mair 1988, Molotch 1976) provides a lens through which we can understand the tourism industry's role in New Orleans.

Groups that are invested in the support of the industry can be found in both the private and public sectors. The various kinds of businesses represented in the tourism industry (such as restaurants, hotels, and tour companies) are strongly supported by the local government. The city of New Orleans has created three offices dedicated to increasing the number of visitors to the city. All are funded by a hotel occupancy tax in the French Quarter. The New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation is tasked with attracting leisure travelers to the city (NOTMC 2013a); the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau with bringing in large meetings (NOCVB 2013b);

[2] I use the hospitality and leisure sector as the Bureau of Labor Statistics designation which most accurately represents the tourism industry in New Orleans.

and the New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network with marketing New Orleans as a destination for African-American tourists (NOMTN 2013).



The locations of the French Quarter and Treme in New Orleans

In this paper, I will examine four specific questions related to how the tourism industry affects the city of New Orleans. First, how does the industry create and maintain a specific product that is perceived as being "authentic"? Second, how and where is this product sold to tourists? I will use the difference between New Orleans' French Quarter and the rest of the city to examine these two points. Third, how does the creation of a specific "New Orleans Experience" and the deliberate spatialization of tourism in the city marginalize African American residents? I will explicate this by using the case of the Treme area. The tourism industry's intervention in the neighborhood has had effects on residents as well as tourists. And finally, how does the tourism industry's dominance of the labor market affect workers in the city?

In examining these issues, I draw on a Marxist frame. It is possible to examine the case of New Orleans by examining the accumulation process at work within the city (Marx 1992). The tourism industry seeks to compete on the basis of both product and cost. The case of product competition will be examined through the maintenance of a particular cultural experience in the city. The case of cost will be examined through the issues of wages paid to workers in the tourism industry. Additionally, it is important to examine how discourses within the city are created and communicated to support this particular accumulation process.

Creating an "Authentic" Product

The Product

The tourism industry's manipulation of the "New Orleans Experience" is analogous to a company's imperative to create a competitive product. In this case, it is a specific experience and the specific area in which it is located that are consumed by tourists. The particular experience that is being sold to tourists in New Orleans requires careful and continuing attention. Tourists are encouraged to visit only certain neighborhoods within the city, and to "invest" their money in those areas. This encouragement takes place through guidebooks, carefully curated websites about the city, and the licensing of tour guides (Jacobs, 2001). These techniques for presenting a specific "version" of New Orleans extend beyond just regulating the spatial extent of the marketed tourist areas. The tourism industry also works to communicate specific narratives about the city.

Creating Narratives

The narratives about New Orleans are necessarily selective; their purpose is to both assure tourists that they are spending their money on something unique and to assuage any doubts about the ethical nature of their trip. Since the exhaustive media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, the idea of the "New Orleans experience" is threatened with negative associations: poverty, racism and a need to rebuild after devastating flooding. Additionally, as with many places in the American South, some visitors remain uncomfortable with the idea of a city built on slavery. Thus, the narratives advanced by the local growth coalition need to address any lingering thoughts in the minds of tourists that they are visiting a city that has a problematic history or present. The view of the city that is maintained and communicated in the tourist narrative is

carefully constructed. This narrative creation is an essential task of the local growth coalition in New Orleans.

In creating a discourse about the city, New Orleans' tourism industry boasts that it has an exciting past, and seeks to communicate and promote all of the city's history within the spaces designed for tourists. Specifically they publicize a legacy of large plantation mansions, a history of Spanish and French colonial rule that is unique in much of the United States, and a Caribbean-influenced culture that stems from a century acting as the United States' main port to South America and the Caribbean. However, the city has also been home to the negative aspects of these very characteristics—notably the horror of slavery and the extreme repression of people of color. Together, these relations create the modern New Orleans, each exercising their own influence on the way the city is perceived and experienced.

This "sense of place" of the city, as per Massey (1979) is constructed via layers of social relations existing in the past and present. The French Quarter is promoted as the archetypical New Orleans neighborhood, the oldest and thus the most "authentic" area to experience this sense of place. In the Quarter, the tourism industry seeks to communicate the positive side of this history—a history of decadence and hedonism for those who can afford it. The industry is responsible for a specific mentality in the Quarter: the idea that tourists can partake in an unproblematic space of leisure when they enter New Orleans. This becomes the city's most appealing characteristic for tourists, who are led to believe that their appropriate role is to be a carefree and self-indulgent consumer. As one advertisement in National Geographic Traveler

proclaims, if you are a tourist in New Orleans, you can "do watcha wanna" (National Geographic, 2012).

Additionally, the idea of African American residents and the idea of "blackness" are used by the industry to increase the sense of authenticity of their product. Some residents of New Orleans claim that this part of the standard tourist narrative is demeaning to African American residents. The accusation is based on the fact that tourism in New Orleans has historically denied African American residents any agency in the tourist experience, making them instead objects to be consumed. New Orleans has constructed itself as an exotic city in multiple ways that are connected to the presence of African American residents in the city. The city's nickname "the Big Easy," for example, seeks to construct New Orleans as a place that is more relaxed than the rest of the United States in terms of both daily activity and sexual mores (Hearn, 2001). Thus it seeks to be seen as a place of sexual freedom and moral laxness, originally due to the ready availability of African American and mixed-race prostitutes in the city during the time of anti-miscegenation laws in the South (Long, 2001). Both of these constructions have focused on the celebrated, but never critically examined, role of "exotic" African American residents. Says CW Cannon, a professor at Loyola University New Orleans and a lifetime resident of the city,

> That's what tourism wants black people to be: part of the architecture. It's not going to cause a problem; a building doesn't talk back to you, and it looks right and it acts right… tourists want black culture, but not black people (2012b).

Another example of the way that tourism industry leverages the presence of African American residents to its own advantage can be found in the writing of the New Orleans Tourism and

Marketing Corporation. On its website, NOTMC describes the "multicultural history" of the city in the following way (2012c):

> The French rulers of colonial Louisiana adopted in 1724 the Code Noir (Black Code) which formally restricted the rights of the slaves forcibly brought over from Africa. But Blacks in New Orleans overall enjoyed more freedoms than their counterparts elsewhere in the New World…. *So instead of being stamped out, aspects of African culture persisted in New Orleans and were eventually absorbed into the city's overall culture. … The city's annual Mardi Gras also temporarily eased the restraints of slavery and gave Blacks license to assert their heritage* (emphasis mine).

There are myriad problems in this conception of the history of African American New Orleanians, but the issue I wish to highlight here is the specific framing of New Orleans' history that is being used to present an exotic African American culture. This practice is not just one associated with representations of the past in the city, but also with the current use of African American culture to create revenue and customers for the tourism industry. Racial difference is made invisible through this conception of the city (Ishiwata 2011); difference becomes simply something to be seen and consumed. Lynell Thomas argues that this framing of the city's past offers a way to simultaneously harness the much coveted "authenticity" that New Orleans promotes while mitigating the worries visitors may have about a city with an uncomfortable history of slavery and discrimination. The discourse connects the city's present to an untroubled past in a way that assigns an unquestionable authenticity to the current (carefully constructed) activities in the city (2007). Despite the fact that the tourism industry seeks to eliminate African

American residents from its space in the French Quarter, "blackness" is seen, ironically, almost as an asset by the tourism industry in New Orleans, though clearly on its own terms.

The Issue of Authenticity

The fact that New Orleans is marketing itself as an experience leads to a great deal of concern in the city over the issue of authenticity. To attract tourists, the growth coalition must convince them that the "New Orleans experience" they pay for cannot be had anywhere else, and that it is not falsely manufactured. Thus, African American residents become an asset in their constructed role as "authentic" cultural creators. New Orleans' city tourist agencies use this idea of African American residents as the creators of authentic culture to promote the city as a unique place to visit. Within spaces that are designated as being "for" tourists, there is an anxiety over authenticity that permeates the psyches of tourists, city officials and cultural creators equally. Because much of New Orleans' tourism is focused on supposedly unique cultural practices like food, music and architecture, authenticity becomes an important quality. Tourists want their money's worth, and so the performances they consume must not be "fake" or at least seem not to be (Gotham 2007). Thus, African American residents play a role in creating an authentic experience because they are constructed as a cultural "other" that provides an "exotic" feel to the city.

This situation is highly upsetting to some residents of the city. One man who explained this to me was Chief Shaka Zulu of the Yellow Pocahontas Tribe, a group which has historically been connected to a unique New Orleans art form: the Mardi Gras Indians. Mardi Gras Indians have multiple origin stories. The most popular claim is that the Mrdi Gras Indians are the mixed race

A memorial to Mardi Gras Indian Chief Tootie Montana, showing his detailed and hand-sewn costume (photo by author).

descendants of slaves who escaped and lived with Native American tribes outside New Orleans (Moser 2006). To celebrate this heritage, Mardi Gras Indian tribes sew elaborate costumes and "mask" (parading in those costumes) on days like Mardi Gras and Saint Joseph's Day.

Chief Shaka Zulu claims that Mardi Gras Indian masking is the last African American art form existing in the United States that is still controlled by African American artists. In his eyes, commercializing the practice to perform for tourists is a betrayal of its history. The evolution of masking out of resistance to dominant/white paradigms should not be corrupted, in his opinion (2012). However, aspects of African American culture, like second lines and Mardi Gras Indians have become a favorite tool for promoters of the city (New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation, 2012b) and an essential part of the commercialized Mardi Gras celebrations (Mardi Gras New Orleans, 2012). The agencies who engage in this kind of marketing, such as the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation and the New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network, claim that it is a celebration of African American culture to use it as a promotional device for the city. (NOTMC 2012c).

To maintain the appeal for tourists, performers in events that are created or promoted by the powerful players in the tourism industry seek above all to represent "authentic" (African American) culture. They fail, however, not least because they hire non-native musicians to perform traditional musical styles. These musicians are often white, thus perpetuating the racial boundaries that exist between the French Quarter and the rest of the city (Cannon 2012b). An

Clockwise from top left: A traditional second line, the jazz band preceding them, and a promotional picture of a carefully staged version in the French Quarter (first two photos by author).

example of this can be seen in the contrast between pictures of a spontaneous, truly "authentic" band parade and second line and a staged production in the French Quarter (above). This leads to a situation in which African American culture is exploited without economic gains or gains in respect for its creators and historic performers.

Creating a Point of Sale

The tourism industry exercises a high level of control over the neighborhoods of New Orleans, and is able to designate them as tourist destinations or not. This designation leads to a situation in which individual neighborhoods are internally and externally constructed as being primarily for residents or for tourists. It is important to note that in referring to neighborhoods, I mean both residential areas and mixed use areas that contain both residents and retail establishments.

I will examine the neighborhood-level spatialization of the tourism industry's promotional tactics by using a case study of the French Quarter. The French Quarter is billed as the heart of New Orleans. It is the city's most popular neighborhood for tourists and the area with the highest concentration of attractions so promoted (New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation, 2012a). I will use the separation between the French Quarter and the rest of the neighborhoods in New Orleans to demonstrate the physical, financial and discursive effects of the tourism industry's influence on the city.

Sanitizing the Space

It is not enough for the tourism industry to promote the positive aspects of the French Quarter and to attempt to purify the discourses surrounding it. It also seeks to mitigate the problematic aspects of its space there. It is important to remember that the tourism industry's appeal stems from being within that specific area. To continue to do business there, the industry must work to remove the place's issues. Thus, the industry must create a "sanitized" space within its cultural tumult. Critics accuse the city of "Disney-fying" the French Quarter and other areas intended to be appealing for tourists (Souther 2007), by attempting to remove anyone who is not a visitor, especially poor people and people of color. This removal creates a clean slate that can be used by

the tourism industry to create a landscape of pleasure and leisure for visitors. This sanitization of space takes place in several specific ways, including through the passage of city ordinances and through changes in the real estate market. Space in the French Quarter is constructed for a certain group, based not on race or class or gender, but on their reasons for coming to the French Quarter in the first place. Specifically, the space is intended to be used by leisure travelers, who the industry wants to make feel safe and relaxed.

Accordingly, for residents of New Orleans, access to the French Quarter is highly mediated by race. James Rhodes writes that New Orleans is split into areas of "private ghetto" and "public arenas," a system in which the Quarter (one of the public arenas) is carefully guarded and African American residents are contained in undesirable neighborhoods (private ghettos) (2010). He ties this phenomenon to a "dual 'privatization' and 'militarization' of public space." This privatization and militarization can be seen in the physical structure of the Quarter. Explicitly public places such as parks are fenced, with regulated hours of occupancy, and the city prioritizes police presence in areas with a large number of tourists (Hutcheson 2012). To gain access to many parts of the Quarter, one must be a paying customer of a bar, restaurant or hotel.

The restrictions on access to space are explicitly codified as well. In January 2012, the New Orleans City Council unanimously passed an ordinance prohibiting those 16 years old or younger from being in the French Quarter or the Faubourg Marigny (an adjacent neighborhood) after 8:00 pm (Carr 2012). Because African-American residents make up 60% of the city, the law disproportionately affects African American youth (Eggler 2012b). Both the French Quarter curfew and a further proposed city-wide policy have drawn criticism from all social strata in the city. Critics "charged that it was an attempt to protect the city's tourist industry and white-owned

businesses while ignoring the greater crime problem in many predominantly African American neighborhoods" (Cannon 2012a). It seems obvious, given the differing attitudes of the city towards the French Quarter and other neighborhoods, that this is a valid critique. Additionally, regardless of race, the policy is another way to ensure that the French Quarter and other tourist areas are constructed mainly for visitors. It seems unlikely that many teenagers will be visiting the French Quarter with their parents or guardians unless they are on vacation together.

I also argue that regardless of class, race, or gender, there is a desire to remove the problematic aspects of the "neighborhoods" popularized for tourism; that there is, therefore, a rejection of neighborhood-esque qualities, namely residents (Gotham 2008). Residents who do remain in the French Quarter complain about "quality of life" issues and about police officers who refuse to enforce laws that would dampen the tourist experience, such as noise ordinances. These residents also have their access to basic city services curtailed by the tourism industry's attempts to attract more visitors to the Quarter. Public transportation is forbidden within the area, and temporary tourist parking is prioritized over long-term residential parking on the narrow streets (Lousteau, 2012).

Fiscal Favoritism

The French Quarter is prioritized by the city's government, both in terms of resource distribution and in being promoted to tourists. Residents of areas outside the Quarter, on the other hand, believe the fact that their neighborhood is *not* as aggressively promoted to tourists affects the share of the city's wealth that it receives. Despite the privileged space it already occupies, the tourism industry is currently seeking even more special treatment from the city. Tellingly, one city official revealed that infrastructure provision and police presence in the French Quarter was

a higher priority for it than providing the same things in other neighborhoods, despite a greater need for those resources elsewhere, because of the presence of tourists (Hutcheson 2012). The official justified this view by citing the high levels of pedestrian and vehicle traffic experienced by the French Quarter, but ignored the fact that extremely poor-quality infrastructure can be found throughout the city.

The way in which the tax money produced by the French Quarter is spent is also often controversial among residents of the city. The French Quarter provides much of the city's tax revenues, but a large proportion of that money is not spent on city services. Instead, much of the tax money generated in the Quarter goes to institutions such as the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation, which serve no purpose outside of the tourism industry. Many residents also charge that higher amounts of city revenue are invested in areas that are more attractive for tourists, which they believe is unfair to other neighborhoods which could – even "should" – also benefit from public funds (Knox, 2012; Ehlinger 2012; Robinson 2012).

However, the leisure and hospitality industry is still seeking greater financial independence from the rest of the city. The State Senator for New Orleans, Democrat Edwin Murray, introduced a 2012 bill that would allow a group of residents and business owners in the French Quarter to implement their own taxes and invest the money in "enhanced public safety and sanitation" (Eggler 2012a). The governing body would be appointed by the tourism and related industries, and would mostly be made up of representatives from the tourism industry. This composition of the governing board was justified because it is predicted that most of the taxes would be paid by tourists (White 2012).

Opponents, however, cite the fact that the taxes will be implemented by a group of businesses for their own benefit—something they see as a conflict of interest (Lousteau 2012). Additionally, levying taxes on visitors to the city that benefit only a certain area and are not diffused in the form of expenditures on the rest of the city makes residents uncomfortable (Eggler 2012). For instance, improving infrastructure or increasing security solely in the French Quarter seems a strange thing to do in a city which sinks another eight millimeters under sea level every year and which had the country's highest murder rate in 2012 (Elliot 2012). Both problems are highly concentrated outside of the French Quarter.

Marginalizing African-American Residents

The tourism industry in New Orleans does not only seek to keep African American residents out of the French Quarter, appropriate culture and create specific discourses about them. It is also involved in marginalizing these residents, both directly and indirectly, in other their spaces of residence. A case of this can be seen in the Treme neighborhood. The Treme neighborhood has not traditionally been marketed to tourists. It bills itself as the "oldest black neighborhood in America" and the birthplace of both jazz and the civil rights movement (Marsalis and Nelson, 2008). It has suffered a great deal from discriminatory planning processes in the past. The two most significant projects still lamented by residents of the neighborhood are the building of the Claiborne Avenue Expressway and of Armstrong Park. Claiborne Avenue was the main artery of Treme before the building of the expressway, a broad boulevard lined with oaks and, more importantly, with African American-owned businesses, whose proprietors filled Treme's houses. However, the boulevard and its businesses were torn down to make way for an elevated expressway (Passavant, 2011), and most businesses have never returned.

Armstrong Park was another project desired by the city's government that required the demolition a great deal of houses. To build it, the city demolished eight square blocks of housing on the south side of Treme (see map). Throughout the 1970s, the housing was progressively torn down, and the land is now buried beneath a park that is barely used. Worst of all, upon completion, the park was immediately cut off from all sides except the side bordering the French Quarter by 15 foot tall iron fences (Knox, 2012). Residents have no easy access to this supposedly public space, and the fences are a blight on their neighborhood. The park is commonly described in unflattering terms by residents of the neighborhood, with one stating that it was simply "a big question mark" (Brooks, 2012). It is ironically billed as a space for the celebration of African American arts and culture (NOTMC, 2013).

However, the city of New Orleans and the tourism industry are beginning to see Treme as more than a dumping ground for city projects that inconvenience residents, such as Armstrong Park and the Claiborne Avenue Expressway. It is now being actively constructed as a new space of tourism. The French Quarter is becoming saturated with visitors—over nine million in 2012 alone (NOCVB 2013a). An area only one third square mile in size cannot comfortably accommodate so many visitors. Additionally, the previously discussed changing economic composition of the area makes it difficult to maintain the supposed "authenticity" of the French Quarter. An area with retail options that cater almost solely to tourists (antique stores, art shops, etc.) is hardly believable as a place where "real" people live. In 1990, the city founded a public agency to promote "multicultural diversity" of tourist experiences and to market specifically to groups made up of African-Americans: The New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network (NOMTN 2013).

Recently, this desire to expand into a new market (African American "diversity") has begun to affect Treme. In 2012, the NOMTN began a special campaign to bring visitors into Treme for the neighborhood's 200th anniversary. The campaign sought to take advantage of the popular HBO show *Treme* and the news coverage of the neighborhood after Hurricane Katrina (Rice 2012). This campaign has led to a definite increase in the number of visitors to the area. There are audio tours offered for Android and iPhone devices that will teach a visitor a carefully cleaned history of Treme (NOTMC 2012d), and guidebooks tout the authentic culture of the neighborhood

A new bed and breakfast (right) and a residential house in Treme (photos by author).

(NOMTN, 2012a). Additionally, bed and breakfast establishments have begun to appear on otherwise decrepit residential streets in Treme, capitalizing on the influx of new visitors (see photos below).

More importantly, however, it should be noted that the neighborhood's increasing popularity with tourists has also had an effect on its residential composition. Its new and higher status have begun to change its reputation among rich residents of the New Orleans. This is not the direct intention of the tourism industry, but I argue that it is a consequence of the tourism industry's treatment of both the French Quarter and Treme. Kevin Fox Gotham has written that the culture of New Orleans is a "touristic" one (2007). By this, he means that the boundaries that traditionally exist between spheres of tourism and home life are blurred. In the case of Treme,

A map of Treme, showing the Claiborne Expressway in red and Armstrong Park in green (courtesy of Wikitravel).

there has been almost an elimination of those boundaries. A shift in the way the tourism industry perceives the neighborhood has led to a significant change in the "home life" of its residents. To catalyze the changing demographics of Treme, two things have happened simultaneously. First, the art and architecture of Treme have been aggressively promoted by the tourism industry. Second, French Quarter property prices have risen vertiginously Gotham 2004). Treme is now seen as a new "hip" but affordable area of town. People who can no longer afford to buy property in the Quarter now invest in Treme instead. Because of the increasing desirability of properties there, the neighborhood is quickly gentrifying. There is a looming threat of residents being forced out of their homes by new buyers eager to live in an "interesting" neighborhood of interesting architecture and old houses. As one young professional told me, neighborhoods like Treme offer a historic option for less: "it's the only way we could afford to break into the market" (Robinson, 2012). Though these migrants were not an intended consequence of the tourism industry's policies, the gentrification of the area is in line with the industry's deliberate actions in the French Quarter. Whether intentional or a happy coincidence

for the tourism industry, the fact is that the neighborhood is being "sanitized" of poor, African American residents without direct actions through laws or discursive construction.

Furthermore, these newcomers are exacerbating social tensions in the neighborhood. In the words of a long-time resident and the head of the Historic Faubourg Treme Association, Jessica Knox, as new residents move into Treme, they "would like to come in and do good things" (2012). According to Ms. Knox, however, the neighborhood's traditional insularity and suspicion of outsiders leads to a negative view of these new residents. This defensiveness comes from a recognition and resultant anger on the part of residents that it has taken the promise of a new wave of visitors and immigrants into the neighborhood, who are richer and often whiter, for the tourism industry to recognize its value. Additionally, Knox told me that new residents often move to Treme with an idea that they will "civilize" its current residents, not realizing that the current residents are "perfectly civilized" and extremely dedicated to their own culture.

A case in point regards what is known as "the second line." When a jazz band parades down the streets in New Orleans, another parade of observers/dancers commonly forms after them. This line is the "second line," as opposed to the "first line" of performers. In Treme, the second line remains an essential part of funerals and neighborhood celebrations. In most richer and whiter neighborhoods in the city, street celebrations are planned in advance and receive permits and legal permission. However, in Treme, second lines are spontaneous and almost never planned through the requisite legal channels (Knox 2012). This culture can be a shock to new residents, who see it as somewhat anarchic. New residents will then notify the city and attempt to have the neighborhood and its performances regulated in the way to which they are accustomed. This

creates a great deal of tension between neighbors, further exacerbating the tensions that the tourism industry has caused in its marketing of the neighborhood. Even Toni Rice, the director of the NOMTN, the very group tasked with promoting Treme, could not put a positive spin on the relationships between new residents and the older residents of the neighborhood (2012).

> "Treme is a funny, funny neighborhood because you have people that were born and raised there and they're suspicious of everybody. I don't care if you've been there 25 years or 2 years, you're not *from* Treme if you weren't born in Treme. It's protective, but it hurts them in a lot of ways because people who would like to come in and do good things, they kind of get turned off by it sometimes."

Effects on the Workplace

> "If they could get you to do it [work for the tourism industry] for free, they would. There's a law against it, there was a war about it, they lost, so they're paying you as close to free as possible. And that is really a core belief of the local economy."
>
> -Helene O'Brien, President of Service Employees International Union Local 21LA (2012)

The tourism industry's desire to have low costs price is reflected in their involvement in the working spaces of the city. Though the tourism industry has a monopoly over the "New Orleans Experience," they still actively seek to lower the wages of their workers. The motivation behind this behavior is likely a combination of the industry's fear that their product may become less

desirable (if their "authenticity" is doubted or if New Orleans culture is no longer as appealing to visitors) and so to compensate through lower wages; and a desire for higher profits for owners and shareholders. I refer to the tourism industry's effects on the workplace due to the comparatively low wages and worker organization in the city. Representatives of the tourism industry argue that the large numbers of jobs for which the tourism industry is responsible and the tax revenue that the industry generates means that it should not be regulated in any way. This has led to various legal and political battles over the conditions of workers in New Orleans. I will examine the effect on work spaces via a case study of a 2002 court case—The Small Business Coalition to Save Jobs, the Louisiana Restaurant Association and the Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region vs. the City of New Orleans—as well as through efforts to unionize.

In addition to having a large effect on the living spaces of New Orleans, the tourism industry has also been very involved in structuring employment conditions in the city. In New Orleans, the tourism and leisure industry is responsible for forty four percent of jobs, and it contributes $200-225 million dollars in tax revenues every year to Orleans Parish (New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2013a).[3] These are facts that the tourism industry often cites in its self-congratulatory reports on the effects of tourism on the New Orleans economy. However, there are a few other statistics that are often left out. The average annual wage in New Orleans is $49,999 per person, but the average annual wage in the hospitality and leisure sector is approximately half of that: $26,148.[4] If we accept labor organization prevalence and union

[3] Orleans Parish is co-extensive with the city of New Orleans and so I will use the terms interchangeably when discussing statistics.

[4] It is important to keep in mind that this takes into account only reported wages and does not include the extremely low, unreported wages paid to undocumented workers. Undocumented labor is something that

membership levels as rough indicators of more desirable working, then the figures for New Orleans are telling. A mere five and a half percent of workers (in all industries) in the New Orleans Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) are represented by unions.

This is not a common feature of places with high levels of employment in tourism. The Las Vegas MSA has 36% of its jobs in the tourism industry and unions represent 19.1% of their workers in all industries. The Atlantic City MSA has 41% of its jobs in the tourism industry and has 17.8% of its workers in all industries unionized (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; Hirsch and McPherson, 2013).[5] Only four establishments associated with the leisure and tourism industry are unionized in New Orleans: one hotel, Harrah's Casino, and the company Center Plate, which employs all food workers at the airport and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (Cooper, 2012). It is nothing new or surprising, though, that labor's influence has been declining lately, or that the US South has traditionally had a weak labor movement (Greenhouse, 2013; Canak and Miller 1990).

The involvement of the tourism industry in the wage rates of their employees is part of their strategy of competing on the basis of price. They claim that less regulation and lower worker costs will lead to better prices for customers (tourists). However, this argument becomes less convincing when we consider the fact that the tourism industry has a monopoly on the "New Orleans Experience." Thanks to the absolute link its product has to a certain physical location, the tourism industry is able to offer a product that no one else can. Given the traditional

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will be discussed briefly later in the paper. The inclusion of these wages would surely bring the average annual wages of the tourism and leisure sector down (as well as slightly lowering the total average wage of the city).

[5] All statistics are from 2011, the most recent year for a common comparison.

economic thinking about monopolies, the tourism industry certainly could afford to charge higher prices to its customers. Regulation that sought to pay higher wages to the tourism industry would not likely be a disadvantage to business. Over the past 15 years, New Orleans has experienced a legal and electoral battle over just such regulation.

Campaign for a Living Wage

In 1996, the New Orleans Campaign for a Living Wage[6] formed to mandate a living wage higher than the minimum wage. The "living wage" proposed would have kept the minimum wage in New Orleans one dollar above the federal minimum wage at all times.[7] They collected the requisite 10,000 signatures, but their first push to put the issue on a ballot was frustrated. The New Orleans City Council claimed that the signatures were invalid because they had been filed in multiple installments instead of at one time. The Campaign threatened to sue the council over the decision (Varney 1996). A convoluted legal and electoral battle followed.

In June 1997, the Louisiana Legislature preemptively passed a bill (House Bill 730) making it illegal for any local entity to establish their own minimum wage laws (Louisiana State Legislature, 1997). There was another attempt to put the living wage mandate on the ballot, but City Council blocked it once again, this time citing the very law that had so conveniently been passed by the state legislature. The Campaign sued (Donze 1997), and after a ruling by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals (Grace 2000a), the measure was put on a February 2002 ballot

[6] The Campaign was made up of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Local 100 of the Service Employees International Union, the Greater New Orleans AFL-CIO, the National Organization for Women, and attorneys from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Loyola Law School (Varney 1996).

[7] The law applied to workers receiving tips as well as those who did not, and did not apply to non-profits or small businesses (Labostrie 2001). Small business, in this case, meant a business grossing less than $500,000/year (Grace 2001).

(Elie 2001). The living wage proposal passed with 63.18% of the vote, seemingly guaranteeing that the minimum wage in New Orleans would always be a full dollar higher than the federal minimum wage (Business Writer 2002).

However, there was still the concern that the living wage law would be found unconstitutional because of HB 730, which was still on the books preventing the establishment of minimum wage laws at any jurisdiction at a lower scale than the state. The Campaign decided to seek preemptive legal action and asked the courts to declare the living wage constitutional under the state's provisions for parish home rule (Campaign for a Living Wage, 2002). They argued that HB 730's restriction on minimum wage regulation violated Orleans Parish's rights to enact its own laws. They hoped that the ruling would allow the new living wage law in New Orleans to go unchallenged by industry in the city (Russell 2002).

A business coalition, dominated by the tourism industry, formed to oppose the new law.[8] The coalition claimed that its purpose in wishing to uphold HB 730 was to "allow [its] members to grow the number of jobs they provide and to prevent actions that would be detrimental to the economy of New Orleans and to the development of jobs in New Orleans" (Small Business Coalition, 2002). The case went to the Civil District Court in New Orleans, where the constitutionality of living wage laws was supported by the Campaign and opposed by the new coalition. The coalition continued to argue that the establishment of a living wage in Orleans

[8] The coalition was made up of the Louisiana Restaurant Association, the Greater New Orleans Hotel and Motel Association and the Louisiana Association of Alcoholic Beverage Licensees, as well as the tourism-dominated Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region and New Orleans Regional Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry and The National Federation of Independent Businesses, Louisiana Chapter lent their weight to the tourism industry's campaign.

parish would ruin the economy of New Orleans. Activists who were involved with the Campaign for a Living Wage objected strongly to this framing of the issue, claiming that the opposition of the tourism industry to the living wage law was "all about pure power" on the part of the tourism industry, which was supported by the rest of the area's businesses, and not about the economic wellbeing of the New Orleans community (O'Brien, 2012). The tourism industry was able to use the legal battle over the living wage law to demonstrate its power to influence political economic relations in New Orleans, as well as to attempt to maintain its desired exploitative employment relations.

The coalition of business interests cleverly tailored its message about the detrimental effects of a living wage law according to its audience. While its claim to the public was that the living wage would harm the economy, its claim in legal arguments was that the case was "not about whether the workers of New Orleans would benefit from a higher minimum wage … [or] even about the economic impact of local variances in the minimum wage," but instead about the prevention of legal "chaos" that would be caused if parishes could each decide their own minimum wages (Small Business Coalition 2002). In September 2002, the case went to the Louisiana Supreme Court. The court ruled 6-1 against the wage increase, calling it unconstitutional and deeming the maintenance of a consistent statewide minimum wage "reasonable" (Finch and Mowbray 2002).

The movement against the living wage law in New Orleans was highly racialized. In the city, there is a strong correlation between race and low wages. African American residents are disproportionally less educated and receive lower wages than white residents (The Urban Institute, 2006; Fussell 2007). This is another way in which the tourism industry has actively worked against African American residents of New Orleans. Besides attempting to appropriate

and control cultural practices from these residents and to limit their access to the supposedly public space of the French Quarter, the industry also helps maintain a severe income inequality in the city.

Unionization

On the other hand, in interviewing workers and labor organizers, it became clear that there is a strong resistance to unionization among residents of the city of New Orleans, including *among exploited workers in the tourism industry themselves.* I will discuss four of those interviews: two with hotel workers/labor activists who wished to remain anonymous, one with Scott Cooper, Secretary of UniteHERE! Local 2262 South Central, and one with Helene O'Brien and Tiger Hammonds, the presidents respectively of the Service Employees International Union Local 21 LA and the Greater New Orleans AFL-CIO. I began this section with a quote from Helene O'Brien, the president of the Local 21 LA of the Service Employees International Union. In the interview from which I took the quote, she alleged that the tourism industry in New Orleans treats its workers so poorly because the businessmen of the region still longed for the easy exploitation of a slave economy.

Though I find the allegation that the tourism industry would like to return to a slave economy somewhat dubious and even sensation-mongering, I did find the sentiment that the tourism industry actively works to encourage workers and other citizens in New Orleans to accept their existing situation telling. As Mr. Hammonds lamented, "Every time you try to get to that next level, they are going to cut you, not only from your feet but from your knees! Do you hear me?

They are going to come out there and *they'll do anything they can to say 'it's not good for the state, it's not good for the economy, it's not good for anybody here!*" (emphasis mine).

This is a message that is clearly effective for workers in the tourism industry. Despite the poor working conditions and the high level of exploitation in the New Orleans tourism industry, workers do tend to be extremely resistant to attempts to organize. As one hotel worker[9] said about her attempts to go to co-workers' homes to discuss unionization with them: "If somebody come knocking at your door and you've already been scared away from unions at your jobs, you've already been harassed maybe, and told 'we'll be watching you', or something like that, and somebody shows up at your door?... [laughing] Ooh!" (Anonymous 2012a). She went on to talk about the number of times her co-workers had shouted at her, slammed their doors in her face, or simply looked through the window to see who was knocking and refused to answer.

Another man,[10] who worked and attempted to organize in a different hotel stated, "the fear of they [sic] job is just so heavy to them…they think they [sic] job is in jeopardy when people start talking about unions" (Anonymous 2012b). This is not an idle fear: The tourism industry does have a reputation for firing workers indiscriminately for attempting to unionize, and Department of Labor lawsuits against these illegal firings can go on for years and result in extremely low compensation once a verdict has been reached (Cooper, 2012). Additionally, the tourism industry uses the availability of undocumented workers in the city (O'Brien, 2012; Hammond, 2012) as a disincentive to attempts to agitate within the workplace. The very fact of these undocumented workers' presence bears explanation.

[9] I am leaving her name out of this paper to respect her conditions for agreeing to talk to me.
[10] Also anonymous as per the conditions of our interview.

Undocumented workers were encouraged to come to New Orleans during the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In the six weeks after the storm, the Department of Homeland Security suspended the required confirmation of the immigration status of workers by employers. In order to be hired, workers who came during that six week period were not required to have documents. However, once the six week suspension was over, most workers wished to remain. Lack of documents became just another way for employers to intimidate them, threatening them with deportation if they complained about poor working conditions or not being paid (Upheaval Productions, 2008; Trujillo-Pagan, 2011). As a result there is a common conception among workers that if they agitate or organize, their employers will simply subcontract out their jobs within the tourism industry to a firm offering extremely cheap labor from undocumented immigrants (Browne-Dianis; Anonymous 2012a; Anonymous 2012b). The reason that these firms are able to offer such cheap labor, of course, is due to the fact that undocumented workers are either paid far below minimum wage, paid with fraudulent checks or simply not paid at all (Browne-Dianis).[11]

However, in addition to the very real threats to livelihood faced by workers who attempt to organize, it is arguable that there is a degree of consent on the part of the workers as well. The residents of New Orleans, most importantly the workers, have accepted a discourse: the tourism industry is too important to be regulated. The industry has been careful to communicate the harmful effects that regulating tourism would have on the economy of New Orleans—fewer jobs, fewer visitors and a great deal of harm to the city's tax base. Additionally, it has been able to

[11] The issue of the exploitation and veritable modern-day slavery of these workers deserves more than to be listed as another form of coercive power on the part of the tourism industry. However, undocumented labor in New Orleans is part of a much larger issue that covers far more than the scope of this paper, and will not be discussed here.

make itself understood as the economic savior of the city, especially in the years of rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina.

The creation of positive discourses about the tourism industry as an important and beneficial sector of the New Orleanian economy is common practice in the city of New Orleans, from city planners to academics (Robinson 2012, Cannon 2012, Ehlinger 2012). In the case of the workers, there seems to be a certain acceptance of it. It may be possible to say that workers in the tourism industry consent to the social and economic relations advanced by the tourism industry because they have few other choices if they are to maintain their jobs. They are being influenced by both discourse and the material reality of a paucity of other employment options.

Conclusion

This paper has made the argument that the role of the tourism industry in the politics of local economic development in New Orleans can be understood as a specific case of the politics of local economic development. More importantly, the tourism industry in New Orleans plays a purposeful and significant role in the economic and social marginalization of residents, specifically African American residents. This occurs through limiting and providing conditions for the occupancy of space within the city, as well as through the tourism industry's large role in the labor market of the city. The industry plays a significant role in structuring spaces in New Orleans, selling appropriated culture as a product to visitors, and in maintaining low wages and exploitative working conditions in its associated businesses. In the city, the French Quarter acts a space in which the industry has created a very specific experience to be sold, which is very carefully created and maintained.

This takes place through specific legal and discursive tactics. Most significantly, African American residents and culture are simultaneously promoted in the abstract and excluded in material practice by the tourism industry. The idea of "blackness" is utilized by the tourism industry to create an aura of authentic and exotic culture. However, this simultaneously leads to several points of possible discomfort for tourists that must be managed, and consequently the discourse surrounding African American residents is purified and the space of the French Quarter sanitized of their presence.

The tourism industry acts in a further negative way through the labor market. Because it provides such a significant number of jobs in the city, it is able to offer minimum wage jobs to many of its employee without negative consequence. It has not been passive in its role as a low-wage employer, either. This can be seen in its active resistance to the Campaign for a Living Wage's attempts to raising the minimum wage in New Orleans. Overall, the role of the tourism industry in the politics of local economic development in New Orleans is something that should be examined critically as a particular manifestation of the politics of local economic development.

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